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CAUTIONS

CONCERNING

COLD BATHING,

AND DRINKING THE

MINERAL WATERS.

[Price Six-pence.]

CAUTIONS

CONCERNING

COLD BATHING,

AND DRINKING THE

MINERAL WATERS.

By WILLIAM BUCHAN, M. D.
Fellow of the Royal College of Phyſicians, Edinburgh.

BEING

An ADDITIONAL CHAPTER to the NINTH EDITION of his DOMESTIC MEDICINE.

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UNIVERSITY
OF BRISTOL
MEDICINE

CAUTIONS CONCERNING COLD BATHING, AND DRINKING THE MINERAL WATERS.

AS it is now fashionable for persons of all ranks to plunge into the sea, and drink the mineral waters, I was desirous of rendering this work still more extensively useful, by the addition of a few practical *Observations on Sea Bathing, and drinking the Mineral Waters of this Country.* Finding it impossible to bring these observations within so narrow a compass as not to swell the book, already too large, into an enormous size, I resolved to confine myself to a few hints, or cautions; which may be of service to persons who bathe, or drink the mineral waters, without being able to put themselves under the care of a physician.

No part of the practice of medicine is of greater importance, or merits more the attention of the physician, as many lives are lost, and numbers ruin their healths, by cold bathing, and an imprudent use of the mineral waters. On some future occasion I may probably resume this subject, as I know not any work that contains a sufficient number of practical observations to regulate the patient's conduct in the use of these active and important medicines.

We have indeed many books on the mineral waters, and ſome of them are written with much ingenuity; but they are chiefly employed in aſcertaining the contents of the waters by chymical analyſis. This, no doubt, has its uſe, but is by no means of ſuch importance as ſome may imagine. A man may know the chymical analyſis of all the articles in the *materia medica*, without being able properly to apply any one of them in the cure of diſeaſes. One page of practical obſervations is worth a whole volume of chymical analyſis. But where are ſuch obſervations to be met with? Few phyſicians are in a ſituation to make them, and fewer ſtill are qualified for ſuch a taſk. It can only be accompliſhed by practitioners who reſide at the fountains, and who, poſſeſſing minds ſuperior to local prejudices, are capable of diſtinguiſhing diſeaſes with accuracy, and of forming a ſound judgment reſpecting the genuine effects of medicines.

Without a proper diſcrimination with regard to the diſeaſe and the conſtitution of the patient, the moſt powerful medicine is more likely to do harm than good. Every one knows that the ſame phyſician who, by cold bathing, cured Auguſtus, by an imprudent uſe of the ſame medicine killed his heir. This induced the Roman ſenate to make laws for regulating the baths, and preventing the numerous evils which aroſe from an imprudent and promiſcuous uſe of thoſe elegant and faſhionable pieces of luxury. But as no ſuch laws exiſt in this country, *every one does that which is right in his own eyes*, and of courſe many muſt do wrong.

People

People are apt to imagine that the ſimple element of water can do no hurt, and that they may plunge into it at any time with impunity. In this, however, they are much miſtaken. I have known palſies and apoplexies occaſioned by going into the cold bath, fevers excited by ſtaying too long in it, and other maladies ſo much aggravated by its continued uſe, that they could never be wholly eradicated. Nor are examples wanting, either in ancient or modern times, of the baneful conſequences which have ariſen alſo from an injudicious application of the *warm* bath; but as warm baths are not ſo common in this country, and are ſeldom uſed but under the direction of a phyſician, I ſhall not enlarge on that part of the ſubject.

Immersion in cold water is a cuſtom which lays claim to the moſt remote antiquity: indeed it muſt have been coëval with man himſelf. The neceſſity of water for the purpoſes of cleanlineſs, and the pleaſure ariſing from its application to the body in hot countries, muſt very early have recommended it to the human ſpecies. Even the example of other animals was ſufficient to give the hint. By inſtinct many of them are led to apply cold water in this manner; and ſome, when deprived of its uſe, have been known to languiſh, and even to die. But whether the practice of cold bathing aroſe from neceſſity, reaſoning, or imitation, is an inquiry of no importance; our buſineſs is to point out the advantages which may be derived from it, and to guard people againſt an improper uſe of it.

The cold bath recommends itſelf in a variety of caſes; and is peculiarly beneficial to the inhabitants of populous cities, who indulge in idleneſs, and lead ſedentary lives. In perſons of this deſcription the action of the ſolids is always too weak, which induces a languid circulation, a crude indigeſted maſs of humours, and obſtructions in the capillary veſſels and glandular ſyſtem. Cold water, from its gravity as well as its tonic power, is well calculated either to obviate or remove theſe ſymptoms. It accelerates the motion of the blood, promotes the different ſecretions, and gives permanent vigour to the ſolids. But all theſe important purpoſes will be more eſſentially anſwered by the application of *ſalt water*. This ought not only to be preferred on account of its ſuperior gravity, but likewiſe for its greater power of ſtimulating the ſkin, which promotes the perſpiration, and prevents the patient from catching cold.

It is neceſſary, however, to obſerve, that cold bathing is more likely to prevent, than to remove obſtructions of the glandular or lymphatic ſyſtem. Indeed, when theſe have arrived at a certain pitch, they are not to be removed by any means. In this caſe the cold bath will only aggravate the ſymptoms, and hurry the unhappy patient into an untimely grave. It is therefore of the utmoſt importance, previous to the patient's entering upon the uſe of the cold bath, to determine whether or not he labours under any obſtinate obſtructions of the lungs or other *viſcera*; and where this

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is the caſe, cold bathing ought ſtrictly to be prohibited *.

In what is called a plethoric ſtate, or too great a fulneſs of the body, it is likewiſe dangerous to uſe the cold bath, without due preparation. In this caſe there is great danger of burſting a blood-veſſel, or occaſioning an inflammation of the brain, or ſome of the *viſcera*. This preçaution is the more neceſſary to citizens, as moſt of them live full, and are of a groſs habit. Yet, what is very remarkable, theſe people reſort in crowds every ſeaſon to the ſea-ſide, and plunge in the water without the leaſt conſideration. No doubt they often eſcape with impunity, but does that give a ſanction to the practice? Perſons of this deſcription ought by no means to bathe, unleſs the body has been previouſly prepared by bleeding, purging, and a ſpare diet.

Another claſs of patients, who ſtand peculiarly in need of the bracing qualities of cold water, is the nervous. This includes a great number of the male, and almoſt all the female inhabitants of great cities. Yet even thoſe perſons ought to be cautious

* The late celebrated Dr. Smollet has indeed ſaid, that if he were perſuaded he had an ulcer in the lungs, he would jump into the cold bath; but here the Doctor evidently ſhews more courage than diſcretion; and that he was more a man of wit than a phyſician, every one will allow. A nervous aſthma, or an atrophy, may be miſtaken for a pulmonary conſumption; yet, in the two former, the cold bath proves often beneficial, though I never knew it ſo in the latter. Indeed, all the phthiſical patients I ever ſaw, who had tried the cold bath, were evidently the worſe for it.

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in uſing the cold bath. Nervous people have often weak bowels, and may, as well as others, be ſubject to congeſtions and obſtructions of the *viſcera*; and in this caſe they will not be able to bear the effects of the cold water. For them, therefore, and indeed for all delicate people, the beſt plan would be to accuſtom themſelves to it by the moſt pleaſing and gentle degrees. They ought to begin with the temperate bath, and gradually uſe it cooler, till at length the coldeſt proves quite agreeable. Nature revolts againſt all great tranſitions; and thoſe who do violence to her dictates, have often cauſe to repent of their temerity.

Wherever cold bathing is practiſed, there ought likewiſe to be tepid baths for the purpoſe mentioned above. Indeed it is the practice of ſome countries to throw cold water over the patient as ſoon as he comes out of the warm bath; but though this may not injure a Ruſſian peaſant, we dare not recommend it to the inhabitants of this country. The ancient Greeks and Romans, we are told, when covered with ſweat and duſt, uſed to plunge into rivers, without receiving the ſmalleſt injury. Though they might often eſcape danger from this imprudent act, yet their conduct was certainly contrary to all the rules of medicine; as I have known many robuſt men throw away their lives by ſuch an attempt. I would not however adviſe patients to go into the cold water when the body is chilly; as much exerciſe, at leaſt, ought to be taken, as may excite a gentle glow all over the body, but by no means ſo as to overheat it.

To young people, and particularly to children, cold bathing is of the laſt importance. Their lax fibres render its tonic powers peculiarly proper. It promotes their growth, increaſes their ſtrength *, and prevents a variety of diſeaſes incident to childhood. Were infants early accuſtomed to the cold bath, it would ſeldom diſagree with them; and we ſhould ſee fewer inſtances of the ſcrofula, rickets, and other diſeaſes, which prove fatal to many, and make others miſerable for life. Sometimes, indeed, theſe diſorders render infants incapable of bearing the ſhock of cold water, but this is owing to their not having been early and regularly accuſtomed to it. It is however neceſſary here to caution young men againſt too frequent bathing; as I have known many fatal conſequences reſult from the daily practice of plunging into rivers and continuing there too long.

The moſt proper time of the day for uſing the cold bath is no doubt the morning, or immediately before dinner; and the beſt mode, that of immerſion head foremoſt. As cold bathing has a conſtant tendency to propel the blood and other humours towards the head, it ought to be a rule always to wet that part firſt. By due attention to this

* The celebrated Galen ſays, that immerſion in cold water is only fit for the young of lions and bears; and recommends warm bathing, as conducive to the growth and ſtrength of infants. How egregiouſly do the greateſt men err whenever they loſe ſight of facts, and ſubſtitute reaſoning in phyſic, in place of obſervation and experience!

circum-

circumſtance, there is reaſon to believe, that violent headachs, and other complaints, which frequently proceed from cold bathing, might be often prevented.

The cold bath, when continued too long, not only occaſions an exceſſive flux of humours towards the head, but chills the blood, cramps the muſcles, relaxes the nerves, and wholly defeats the intention of bathing. Hence, by not adverting to this circumſtance, expert ſwimmers are often injured, and even ſometimes loſe their lives. All the beneficial purpoſes of cold bathing are anſwered by one ſingle immerſion; and the patient ought to be rubbed dry the moment he comes out of the water, and ſhould continue to take exerciſe for ſome time after.

When cold bathing occaſions chilneſs, loſs of appetite, liſtleſſneſs, pain of the breaſt or bowels, a proſtration of ſtrength, or violent head-achs, it ought to be diſcontinued.

Though theſe hints are by no means intended to point out all the caſes where cold bathing may be hurtful; nor to illuſtrate its extenſive utility as a medicine; yet, it is hoped, they may ſerve to guard people againſt ſome of thoſe errors into which from mere inattention they are apt to fall; and thereby not only endanger their own lives, but bring an excellent medicine into diſrepute *.

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* Since the preceding Obſervations have been ſent to the Preſs, a circumſtance has occurred, which affords the ſtrongeſt proof that could be given, of the danger of plunging at ran-

THE internal uſe of water, as a medicine, is no leſs an object of the phyſician's attention than the external. Pure elementary water is indeed the moſt inoffenſive of all liquors, and conſtitutes a principal part of the food of every animal. But this element is often impregnated with ſubſtances of a very active and penetrating nature; and of ſuch an inſidious quality, that, while they promote certain ſecretions, and even alleviate ſome diſagreeable ſymptoms, they weaken the powers of life, undermine the conſtitution, and lay the foundation of

dom into cold water. When I heard of the celebrated Mr. Colman's illneſs, and that it had happened at Margate, I immediately ſuſpected the cauſe, and mentioned my ſuſpicion to ſome medical friends; but as none of them could inform me concerning the real circumſtances of his caſe, I ſhould have taken no notice of it, had not the following Letter in the London Chronicle ſtruck my attention.

To the PRINTER.

"SIR,

"Having ſeen in your own and other London papers, ſerious accounts of Mr. Colman's illneſs, I, who have attended him during the whole time, think it but juſtice to him and his many friends, to give you a plain and true account of his caſe and preſent ſituation.

"Mr. Colman's diſorder was a combination of the gout and palſy, the laſt of which was occaſioned by his unadviſedly bathing in the ſea at an improper period, which ſtruck in the gout; the conſequences, as might be expected, ſoon became very ſerious, and his ſituation extremely dangerous, &c.

(Signed) JOHN SILVER, Surgeon."

MARGATE,
Nov. 5, 1785.

worſe diſeaſes than thoſe which they were employed to remove. Of this every practitioner muſt have ſeen inſtances; and phyſicians of eminence have more than once declared that they have known more diſeaſes occaſioned than removed by the uſe of mineral waters. This, doubtleſs, has proceeded from the abuſe of thoſe powerful medicines, which evinces the neceſſity of uſing them with caution.

By examining the contents of the mineral waters which are moſt uſed in this country, we ſhall be enabled to form an idea of the danger which may ariſe from an improper application of them either externally or internally, though it is to the latter of theſe that the preſent obſervations are chiefly confined.

The waters moſt in uſe for medical purpoſes in Britain, are thoſe impregnated with ſalts, ſulphur, or iron, either ſeparately, or variouſly combined. Of theſe the moſt powerful is the ſaline ſulphureous water of Harrowgate, of which I have had more occaſion to obſerve the pernicious conſequences, when improperly uſed, than of any other. To this therefore the following remarks will more immediately relate, though they will be found applicable to all the purging waters in the kingdom which are ſtrong enough to merit attention.

The errors which ſo often defeat the intention of drinking the purgative mineral waters, and which ſo frequently prove injurious to the patient, proceed from the manner of drinking, the quantity taken, the regimen purſued, or, uſing them in caſes where they are not proper.

A VERY hurtful prejudice ſtill prevails in this country, that all diſeaſes muſt be cured by medicines taken into the ſtomach, and that the more violently theſe medicines operate, they are the more likely to have the deſired effect. This opinion has proved fatal to thouſands; and will, in all probability, deſtroy many more before it can be wholly eradicated. Purging is often uſeful in acute diſeaſes, and in chronical caſes may pave the way for the operation of other medicines; but it will ſeldom perform a cure; and by exhauſting the ſtrength of the patient, will often leave him in a worſe condition than it found him. That this is frequently the caſe with regard to the more active mineral waters, every perſon converſant in theſe matters will readily allow.

STRONG ſtimulants applied to the ſtomach and bowels for a length of time, muſt tend to weaken and deſtroy their energy; and what ſtimulants are more active than ſalt and ſulphur, eſpecially when theſe ſubſtances are intimately combined, and carried through the ſyſtem by the penetrating medium of water? Thoſe bowels muſt be ſtrong indeed, which can withſtand the daily operation of ſuch active principles for months together, and not be injured. This, however, is the plan purſued by moſt of thoſe who drink the purging mineral waters, and whoſe circumſtances will permit them to continue long enough at thoſe faſhionable places of reſort.

MANY people imagine, that every thing depends on the quantity of water taken, and that the more they drink they will the ſooner get well. This is

an egregious error; for, while the unhappy patient thinks he is by this means eradicating his diſorder, he is often, in fact, undermining the powers of life, and ruining his conſtitution. Indeed nothing can do this ſo effectually as weakening the powers of digeſtion by the improper application of ſtrong ſtimulants. The very eſſence of health depends on the digeſtive organs performing their due functions, and the moſt tedious maladies are all connected with indigeſtion.

Drinking the water in too great quantity, not only injures the bowels and occaſions indigeſtion, but generally defeats the intention for which it is taken. The diſeaſes for the cure of which mineral waters are chiefly celebrated, are moſtly of the chronic kind; and it is well known that ſuch diſeaſes can only be cured by the ſlow operation of alteratives, or ſuch medicines as act by inducing a gradual change in the habit. This requires length of time, and never can be effected by medicines which run off by ſtool, and only operate on the firſt paſſages.

Those who wiſh for the cure of any obſtinate malady from the mineral waters, ought to take them in ſuch a manner as hardly to produce any effect whatever on the bowels. With this view a half-pint glaſs may be drank at bed-time *, and the ſame

* When I ſpeak of drinking a glaſs of the water over-night, I muſt beg leave to caution thoſe who follow this plan againſt eating heavy ſuppers. The late Dr. Daltry of York, who was the firſt that brought the Harrowgate-waters into repute, uſed to adviſe his patients to drink a glaſs before they went to bed; the

ſame quantity an hour before breakfaſt, dinner, and ſupper. The doſe, however, muſt vary according to circumſtances. Even the quantity mentioned above will purge ſome perſons, while others will drink twice as much without being in the leaſt moved by it. Its operation on the bowels is the only ſtandard for uſing the water as an alterative. No more ought to be taken than barely to move the body; nor is it always neceſſary to carry it this length, provided the water goes off by the other emunctories, and does not occaſion a chilneſs, or flatulency in the ſtomach or bowels. When the water is intended to purge, the quantity mentioned above may be all taken before breakfaſt.

I would not only caution patients who drink the purging mineral waters over-night, to avoid heavy ſuppers, but alſo from eating heavy meals at any time. The ſtimulus of water, impregnated with ſalts, ſeems to create a falſe appetite. I have ſeen a delicate perſon, after drinking the Harrowgate waters of a morning, eat a breakfaſt ſufficient to have ſerved two ploughmen, devour a plentiful dinner of fleſh and fiſh, and to crown all, eat ſuch a ſupper as might have ſatisfied a hungry porter. All this indeed the ſtomach ſeemed to crave, but this craving had better remain not quite ſatisfied, than that the ſtomach ſhould be loaded with what exceeds its powers. To ſtarve patients was never my plan, but I am clearly of opinion, that, in the uſe of all the purging mineral waters, a light and rather diluting

the conſequence of which was, that having eat a fleſh ſupper, and the water operating in the night, they were often tormented with gripes, and obliged to call for medical aſſiſtance.

diet is the moſt proper; and that no perſon, during ſuch a courſe, ought to eat to the full extent of what his appetite craves.

To promote the operation of mineral waters, and to carry them through the ſyſtem, exerciſe is indiſpenſably neceſſary. This may be taken in any manner that is moſt agreeable to the patient, but he ought never to carry it to exceſs. The beſt kinds of exerciſe are thoſe connected with amuſement. Every thing that tends to exhilarate the ſpirits, not only promotes the operation of the waters, but acts as a medicine. All who reſort to the mineral waters ought therefore to leave every care behind, to mix with the company, and to make themſelves as cheerful and happy as poſſible. From this conduct, aſſiſted by the free and wholeſome air of thoſe faſhionable places of reſort, and alſo the regular and early hours which are uſually kept, the patient often receives more benefit than from uſing the waters.

But the greateſt errors in drinking the purging mineral waters ariſe from their being uſed in caſes where they are abſolutely improper, and adverſe to the nature of the diſeaſe. When people hear of a wonderful cure having been performed by ſome mineral water, they immediately conclude that it will cure every thing, and accordingly ſwallow it down, when they might as well take poiſon. Patients ought to be well informed, before they begin to drink the more active kinds of mineral waters, of the propriety of the courſe, and ſhould never perſiſt in uſing them when they are found to aggravate the diſorder.

In all cases where purging is indicated, the saline mineral waters will be found to fulfil this intention better than any other medicine. Their operation, if taken in proper quantity, is generally mild; and they are neither found to irritate the nerves, nor debilitate the patient, so much as the other purgatives.

As a purgative, these waters are chiefly recommended in diseases of the first passages, accompanied with, or proceeding from, inactivity of the stomach and bowels, acidity, indigestion, vitiated bile, worms, putrid sordes, the piles, and jaundice. In most cases of this kind, they are the best medicines that can be administered. But when used with this view, it is sufficient to take them twice, or at most three times a week, so as to move the body three or four times; and it will be proper to continue this course for a few weeks.

But the operation of the more active mineral waters is not confined to the first passages. They often promote the discharge of urine, and not unfrequently increase the perspiration. This shews that they are capable of penetrating into every part of the body, and of stimulating the whole system. Hence arises their efficacy in removing the most obstinate of all disorders, *obstructions of the glandular and lymphatic system*. Under this class is comprehended the scrofula or *King's evil*, indolent tumours, obstructions of the liver, spleen, kidnies, and mesenteric glands. When these great purposes are to be effected, the waters must be used in the gradual manner mentioned above, and persisted in for a length of time. It will be proper, however, now and then to discontinue their use for a few days.

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The next great claſs of diſeaſes where mineral waters are found to be beneficial, are thoſe of the ſkin, as the itch, ſcab, tetters, ringworms, ſcaly eruptions, leproſies, blotches, foul ulcers, &c. Though theſe may ſeem ſuperficial, yet they are often the moſt obſtinate which the phyſician has to encounter, and not unfrequently ſet his ſkill at defiance: But they will ſometimes yield to the application of mineral waters for a ſufficient length of time, and in moſt caſes at leaſt theſe waters deſerve a trial. The ſaline ſulphureous waters, ſuch as thoſe of Moffat in Scotland, and Harrowgate in England, are the moſt likely to ſucceed in diſeaſes of the ſkin; but for this purpoſe it will be neceſſary not only to drink the waters, but likewiſe to uſe them externally.

To enumerate more particularly the qualities of the different mineral waters, to ſpecify thoſe diſeaſes in which they are reſpectively indicated, and to point out their proper modes of application, would be an uſeful, and by no means a diſagreeable employment; but as the limits preſcribed to theſe remarks, being only one ſheet, will not allow me to treat the ſubject more at length, I ſhall conclude by obſerving, that whenever the mineral waters are found to exhauſt the ſtrength, depreſs the ſpirits, take away the appetite, excite fevers, diſtend the bowels, occaſion or increaſe a cough, or where there is reaſon to ſuſpect an ulcer of the lungs, they ought to be diſcontinued.

THE END.